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## Moving toward the Museum in 18th-Century Germany

### Résumé

*Au 18<sup>e</sup> siècle, la manière dont on concevait les musées en Allemagne relevait en grande partie de la théorie. En dépit d'efforts pour faire du musée une institution civique, la plupart des collections en Europe germanophone sont demeurées dans un cadre privé jusque bien plus tard dans ce siècle, cachées aux yeux du public et difficiles d'accès en termes conventionnels. La visite des collections était par conséquent réservée aux rares initiés (et invités), qui se déplaçaient souvent sur de grandes distances pour voir les objets exposés et qui ensuite faisaient part de leurs connaissances de ces expositions à d'autres, dans des séries d'écrits esthétiques. Cet article examine l'intense interaction entre la culture imprimée et les pratiques de collectionnement dans l'Allemagne du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle, en se concentrant plus particulièrement sur l'interconnexion vitale entre la discursivité et l'objet concret. Il explore la nature générale de cette relation, tout en illustrant également l'impact que celle-ci a eu sur les pratiques émergentes de collectionnement en Allemagne. Il considère la promulgation du collectionnement dans ce contexte comme étant avant tout une stratégie textuelle, plutôt qu'une réalité factuelle, et évalue attentivement le rôle qu'a joué la lecture dans la promotion de l'acquisition et de la collection de culture matérielle auprès du grand public, postérieurement à l'époque des Lumières.*

### Abstract

*In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the museum experience in Germany was largely a theoretical enterprise. Despite efforts to initiate the museum as a civic institution, the majority of collections in Germanophone Europe remained in private ownership until much later in the century, secluded from public view and difficult to access in conventional terms. Visitation to collections was consequently limited to the initiated (and invited) few, who often travelled great distances to view displayed objects and who then communicated their knowledge of exhibits to others in a series of aesthetic writings. This article examines the intense interaction of print culture and collecting practices in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Germany by focusing specifically on the vital interconnection existing between discursivity and the physical object. It explores the general nature of this relationship, while also illustrating the impact it had on the nascent public practice of collecting in Germany. It regards the promulgation of collecting within this context primarily as a textual strategy, rather than as a factual reality, and evaluates the role reading played in promoting the acquisition and collection of material culture to a post-Enlightenment general public.*

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century two thirds of all art collections in Germany were located in private homes (Grieger 1997: 118ff). They were sequestered within the domains of individual owners and subject to the conditions of households,

rather than to the institutional standards of the public sphere. The implications of this fact are manifold, as they touch on matters that pertain to the national development of material and aesthetic culture, the evolution of the museum

into a civic institution, and more generally to the establishment of an accessible public domain. Surprisingly, these developments and ultimately the isolation that ensued, did not result in a total demise of appreciation for the aesthetic object; instead, collecting surged as a popular pastime throughout the long 18th century. In fact, in the late 1700s, a community of aficionados emerged, determined to communicate the social and cultural value of collections, instituting for this purpose certain publishing initiatives and a particular style of writing to promote the value of collections and material culture in general. These writers exploited the availability of print media to reach their intended audience and resorted to the use of language to spark interest in these privately owned but precious items. Their commentaries were not polemical discussions on the aesthetic merit of an individual item (or a collection) but instead a direct encouragement to the reader to move, to go beyond the written text and to travel—to experience in person the things observed.

Objects assumed an unmistakable narrative dimension within this context. They were represented as texts and consumed as texts by a reading audience keen to learn about the facets of material culture and genuinely curious about its existence. When considering this situation it is important to keep in mind the overall popularity of reading as a pastime in Germany at this time, which likely only intensified this textual perception of objects. *Lesewut*, the so-called reading mania, was at an all-time high in the late 18th century, having created a new set of enthusiastic, if uncritical, readers eager to devour information from a wide variety of print sources. Reading was also big business: there were more than one thousand periodicals on the market, and numerous discussions on how to regulate the burgeoning production of text media to a large consumer audience, dealing with issues such as piracy, plagiarism, and the intellectual accountability of this expanding print industry. All of these factors must be considered as playing a role in the textual promulgation of objects in 18th-century Germany, for the distribution of this information found a truly unique reception there. Not only did circumstances allow for a wide distribution of information through a large array of textual media, but they also promoted a mobility of knowledge since the circulation of

printed matter was the primary carrier of news to the general public.

This relationship between mobility and print was made explicit in periodicals focusing on travel as a topic of exploration. Travel became a central theme of many of the aesthetic commentaries published, with authors writing about their journeys and citing various art collections as an integral part of the undertaken journey. The peripatetic authors giving the account would regularly title their synopses in such a way that made it seem as if they belonged to the larger framework of an ongoing journey. Bearing titles such as “Brief eines Reisenden Dänen” (Schiller 1785; Letter of a travelling Dane), “Fragment aus dem Tagebuch eines Reisenden” (Morgenstern 1798; Fragment from the Journal of a Traveller),<sup>1</sup> these texts advocated the value of travel primarily as an opportunity to see art. They also positioned travel in close association to the personal experience of art, presenting the two activities as naturally and logically interconnected.

To the outside observer, this practice might seem consistent with the early modern but long-standing *ars apodemica* tradition, a mode of travel writing that had originated in post-Renaissance Germany and that theorized travel for the benefit of an inexperienced audience (Stagl 1995: 70ff). Apodemic texts attempted to help the reader become a “good” traveller by advising how best to utilize the journey in one’s self-betterment and education. They considered travel as a mobile art form in itself and focused on the journey as the means of achieving such aims. The timing of the publications discussed in this article, however, sets them somewhat apart from these conservative didactic texts, for by the late 1700s apodemic writing was no longer the prominent means by which to address travel. The brand of travel writing considered here, with its emphasis on the narrativization of objects and the aesthetic experience, was instead more readily practised on the Grand Tour where many travellers recounted their experiences through writing and with an impressionable first-person narrator.

James Buzard notes that the Grand Tour offered a whole new paradigm for travelling in the 18th century. Significantly, it centered travel on the subjective aesthetic experience of the individual, developing a new vocabulary associated with travel, while also establishing

a radically different focus for the journey itself. The Grand Tour was envisioned as much as an inward journey as it was an actual tour of particular cultural sites. As Buzard explains, it was construed primarily as an “ideological exercise” (2002: 38) bent on furthering the sophistication of the young men who participated, developing their “historical consciousness and artistic tastes” (2002: 40), tastes that were then frequently expressed in writing through letters or other types of reflection. Much of this erudition took place by following an established itinerary and by imitating the historical aesthetic interests of others who had documented their views in a number of popular texts. Buzard cites Joseph Addison’s book *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705) as a case in point, stating that this authoritative text became the “indispensable handbook” (2002: 40) for those visiting the ancient sites and monuments.

The German texts discussed in this article serve a similar purpose: they provide direction to locations of cultural and aesthetic activity, firmly promoting the cause of material culture. In doing so, they make material objects’ central role within the formation of that activity explicit, and signal that these material objects warrant further scrutiny and attention from readers. They narrate the experience of art and travel but do so with a particular objective: to create enough inspiration to stimulate actual visitation to the site in question. Consequently, what these texts are attempting to do is convert the reader of the text to a visitor of the display space, encouraging a direct experience with the narrated artifact.

Beyond communicating information about objects and conveying cultural knowledge, then, these texts also promote a physical mobility, motivating the readers to move toward the objects and sites described. These texts thus seek to inform readers, but they also want, quite literally, to move them, educating them about the existence of an aesthetic and material culture while motivating both the mind and the body toward travel. Furthermore, because they are focused on specific sites and objects—rather than on elaborate itineraries—these texts cannot be construed as travelogues in the conventional sense. In nature and appearance they are much more similar to dispatches: practical notices that seek to alert and stimulate, while providing useful

knowledge, both geographical and cultural, to those reading them.

One must keep in mind the state of Germany in the 18th century. Although gradually centralizing into organized units around the newly formed political powers of Prussia, Saxony, and Bavaria, the country as a whole was still living out the legacy inherited from the previous century. Defined as *Kleinstaaterei*, Germany in the 18th century comprised over three hundred different principalities, each of which claimed political and cultural autonomy and governed its affairs with separate jurisdictions (Hahn 1995: 56). In these conditions there was no real state capital, nor was there a uniform cultural focus on a particular city to act as the model urban centre. In other European countries national institutions were being founded (the British Museum, 1753; the Louvre, 1793) to carry and communicate cultural heritage to the general public, but in Germany there was no such cohesion. There was no opportunity to house, centralize, or display material culture in a shared public venue. Everything was dispersed. Literati were especially attuned to the socio-cultural implications of this isolation and throughout the 18th century they resorted to print culture to establish cultural unity.

Authors writing about aesthetic and material culture quickly understood the significance reading had in this piecemeal and incongruent situation and associated the act of reading with mobility and a wide distribution of information. Entire journals were dedicated to the matter of networking as they directed their prose and editorials toward cultural cohesion. In some cases, textual media itself was appropriated to a format compatible with travel. Editors and writers went as far as to modify the physical design of their publications to suit the needs of a traveller, adapting their publication to a practical usage occurring outside of a library or a private home. This foresight was certainly the intention of Johann Georg Meusel (1743-1820), lexicographer and publisher of the journal *Museum für Künstler und Kunstliebhaber* (Museum for Artists and Art Aficionados). When compiling his registry of artists in Germany in 1787, he purposely published the work in a small format in order to make it convenient to his travelling readers. He presupposed that they would have to journey to see the works of the artists that he listed and

understood that travel and material culture were intertwined in a unique way: “*Die Notizen von Bibliotheken, Kunst- und Naturalienkabinetten müssen kurzgefaßt werden, weil das Verzeichniß für Reisende eingerichtet ist, die sich nicht mit vielen Bänden schleppen können*” (1787a: 99; The notes from libraries, art and natural cabinets must be shortened, because this inventory is intended for travellers, who cannot carry too many volumes with them).

In many cases the editor of the journal also proved keen to facilitate a type of cultural contact with the reader and saw this mediating role as an important editorial function. Note Meusel’s effervescent enthusiasm in articulating his purpose as editor of *Museum für Künstler und Kunstliebhaber* (1787-1792), a magazine exclusively focused on artistic content: “*Ich genoß das Vergnügen, Künstler und Kunstfreunde auf mehr als eine Art mit einander bekannt zu machen; jenen Belohnung und Absatz, diesen den Besitz herrlicher Werke zu verschaffen*” (1787b: 1; I enjoyed the pleasure of acquainting artists with the friends of art in more ways than one, the former to obtain a reward and a sale, the latter to be able to possess a divine piece of art). As becomes evident, the *persona* of the editor within this context was frequently as important as the information communicated because it was he or she who ensured that this news be relayed to an interested audience. There was a strong sense of pedagogical service underlying this type of publication, as the information was used not only to entertain but to educate the people who came into touch with it. Meusel had the sense that he was building a new type of community network and noted the relative benefits of this endeavour:

Wie lohnend, wie erfreulich für mich war es, wenn ich Gelegenheit fand, schlummernde Talente zu wecken, junge Genie, zu ermuntern, unbekannte oder auch verkannt Köpfe und ihre Arbeiten dem Publikum vorzuführen und zu empfehlen. (1787b: 2)

(How rewarding, how joyful was it for me, when I encountered the opportunity to encourage slumbering talent and young genius, to bring and recommend those unknown and misjudged minds and their work to the public.)

In order to deliver the cultural objectives he had set out to achieve, Meusel provided an array of depictions (“Beschreibungen”) of individual collections in his journal, allowing the authors’

writing to reconstruct the physical experience of the museum space and to render in great detail the layout of the display seen. Their representation of the space was documented for the most part impressionistically, which was useful in disseminating information due to its sensationalistic effect because the experienced impact could be easily communicated to the reader. For example, while describing paintings viewed in the princely residence in Munich, the following anonymous, but highly dramatic, observations were made:

Gleich beim Eintritt wird der Kunstliebende durch ein Schauspiel überrascht, das die Opferung der drei Weisen aus Morgenland vorstellt, von Rubens geistreicher Erfindung. Lebensgrosse Figuren, die Pracht der Gewänder; die herumstehende Menge, Lichtauffall, Stärke durch einen Schlagschatten; Kontrast und Verschiedenheit, und die herrschende Leidenschaft des Erstauens wirken mit solcher Kraft; daß man von diesem Anblick ganz hingerissen wird. (Anon. 1790a: 365)

(Upon entry the art lover will be surprised by the spectacle of the presentation of the sacrifice of the Three Wise Men from the East, a witty invention by Rubens. Life-sized figures, the luxury of their dress, the gathered crowds, the casting of the light, the emphasis through shadows, the contrast and differentiation and the dominant passion of amazement have such an impact that one is completely taken by this sight.)

Aside from the name of the painter (Rubens) and the thematic concept of the painting, little else is revealed in the article. Formal information is completely lacking; it is the impact of the painting that persists. This sensationalistic writing is not reserved for the display spaces of nobility alone; it is used indiscriminately in the depictions of other items from lower members of society. For example, “*Beschreibung einiger Gemähle aus der Sammlung des Kaufmanns Fischer*” (Anon. 1790b: 325; Description of Certain Paintings in Merchant Kaufmann’s Collection) is published within the same issue of the journal by an anonymous author, and it is written in the same awestruck manner, despite portraying a much more modest display.

In this campaign for publicity, certain collections of objects were vetted more prominently than others. The *Kunst-Kabinett* in Dresden was a case in point. The collection had been a popular



site of pilgrimage for European art lovers and had many eminent literati among its admirers. Author Johann Wolfgang von Goethe referenced it in his novella *Der Sammler und die Seinigen* (1998a [1799]; The Collector and his Circle), and his friend and collaborator Heinrich Meyer visited the collection many times in the 1790s. Art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann based his influential 1755 essay “Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke” (Reflections Concerning the Imitation of Grecian Artwork) on observations made from items in the Dresden collection. This high-profile attention and profusion of informed opinion did not preclude other, less famous authors from also addressing it in print and declaiming its beauty. These authors spoke from an amateur point of view, but they wrote passionately about what they had seen, attempting to encourage fellow readers to visit the collection for themselves. Their testimony was based on factual experience and on a deeply felt personal conviction that the site was visit-worthy. The fact that the writer of the article was not a professional art connoisseur, or someone with specific expertise, was at times deemed an advantage and even flaunted to readers to make the account more authentic.

There is a great deal of persuasion in this type of discourse and this rhetoric becomes a recurring feature in the prose produced by these authors. A good example of this is Wilhelm Heinse’s homage to the famous Düsseldorf gallery, a collection initially assembled by Prince Johann Wilhelm in 1709. In his series of letters *Über einige Gemälde der Düsseldorfer Gallerie* (On certain paintings of the Düsseldorf Gallery, 1776-1777), Heinse lamented the limitations of language to carry the full experience of the gallery. He constantly reminded his readers of his deficiency in communicating this sublime experience in the form of language and implored them to come and witness the collection themselves. In his enthusiasm he referred to the Düsseldorf art collection as a collection of no comparison in Germany, dismissing even the famed Dresden collection as second rate. In his depictions Heinse stressed the value of the eye and immediacy of feeling he experienced when viewing the paintings and reminded his readers that this sensation was so grand that it was not something language alone could bear. He admitted rather candidly:

“Jedoch gebe ich Ihnen aus keinem Gemälde mehr, als die Idee und das Mahlerische derselben, so wie ich erkenne; weil ich zu überzeugt bin, daß alles andre mit eignen Augen muß gesehen werden” (1777: 61; From these paintings I can convey to you no more than the idea and that which has already been depicted, and only as I myself perceive it, for I am convinced that everything else must be seen with one’s own eyes). Heinse was meticulous in describing the Düsseldorf paintings for his readers and he listed with great care the titles and themes of the images he witnessed. However, in providing this detailed and convincing record, he also beseeched readers to come to Düsseldorf in person to participate in this heightened experience of art. The Rubens paintings in particular seemed to overwhelm Heinse, who found it impossible to describe them, noting: “Ich bin des Beschreibens müde...” (1777: 89; I am so tired of describing).

Art exhibits were also construed as valuable news items and were presented to the public as *Kunstnachrichten* (art news) together with other current events. There were thus frequent reports from the emerging German urban centres of Berlin, Munich, and Frankfurt, where new collections were being discovered and where collected objects were diligently chronicled for the reading public. Designated as news, these accounts invigorated the entire perception of material culture: the understanding of these items was a matter of cultural currency, rather than a matter of personal ownership alone. This type of news reporting also distanced such accounts of material culture from the dangers of a sterile and antiquarian approach to art, which customarily viewed aesthetic items in terms of personal property. These news reports had both vibrancy and social gravitas, lending a momentum to the writing which, in turn, made the collections themselves appear communally relevant to readers. Christoph Martin Wieland’s magazine *Der Teutsche Merkur* (1773-1789) and *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* (1790-1810) were particularly adept in integrating matters of aesthetic and material cultural into its pages and regularly included such reports alongside other articles of political and literary nature.

In some cases the articles published in the *Teutsche Merkur* publicized an event that had already occurred and supplemented the existing information available with personal opinion to

enforce the significance of the event. In 1798 archeologist Aloys Hirt published “*Über die Berliner Kunstausstellung im Jahre 1798*” (On the Berlin Art Exhibit 1798), an article that sought to chronicle the recent annual exhibit for the public, but that asserted a complementary and expert view to the existing catalogue. Hirt cited the official catalogue—“*Beschreibung der Kunstwerke, welche von der königl. Akademie der Künste in den Zimmern der Akademie den 23 September ausgestellt sind*” (Hirt 1798: 290; Depiction of Artwork displayed by the Royal Academy of Arts in the Academy on September 23)—but then continued to communicate the impact of the exhibit on the public, noting primarily the social significance of the event. Describing the overall interest and excitement this exhibit had caused in the city of Berlin, Hirt used the news of this success to lobby openly for the establishment of a proper public museum:

Die Berliner gewöhnen sich immer mehr Kunstsachen zu sehen an, und noch immer ging kein Tag vorbei ohne eine Menge von Besuchenden und zwar von allen Klassen von Menschen ... Man hatte bis jetzt viel zu wenig Gelegenheit etwas Gutes, und zwar öfters zu sehen. Nach und nach wird auch dies Sehen ein Bedürfnis werden: und uns fehlet nichts als die projektierte Aufführung eines Museums und einer Gallerie in der Hauptstadt. (1798: 290)

(The Berliners are getting ever more accustomed to viewing art, and not a day has gone by without a full crowd of visitors, compiled of many classes of people ... until now one has had too little opportunity to see something good frequently. This type of viewing will eventually become a necessity, and we are lacking nothing more than the planned establishment of a museum or gallery in the capital.)

The pages of the *Teutsche Merkur* were utilized to celebrate smaller and less obvious collections as well. For instance, in the 1802 issue of the *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* an article was written about the local Beygangs library in Leipzig, and it noted this collection of books for interested readers. It was mentioned in association with the new Pinther Museum in Dresden, a collection inspired by the Beygangs library, which was a carefully placed reference meant to signpost this site as a spot worthy of a future visit. This article focused on the efforts of the owner, Johann Gottlieb Beygang, who gathered

these volumes of reading material together and who chose to display them to the public in a congenial environment. There is extended reference to the comfortable atmosphere associated with this public reading space, which renders a cohesive understanding of the collection itself, demonstrating that there is a strong interrelationship between the object (book) and agent (readers). Moreover, the depiction of the Beygangs Museum (as it was popularly known) was an example where human agency was openly recognized as an integral part in the maintenance of material culture; it was clearly regarded as an important factor in assembling and communicating the collection. In this particular case the name “Beygang” was used as a promotional tool, a guarantor of quality as it were, to draw the public to come and visit the collection in person.

Individual involvement was frequently cited in print in the narrating of collections, and in many articles the focus was on the owner or curator of a collection, and on the role that person played in the maintenance of the items under his or her care. In 1801 *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* offered news on the current status of the prominent Düsseldorf Gallery, a historical collection famous in its own right. It cited the good work of its director Johann Peter von Langer (1756-1824), who had recovered paintings that had been distributed throughout other collections in the region. Langer was personally credited with securing the return of these valuable paintings after seven years and was praised for reinstating the gallery to its former glory. The fact that these paintings were named in print and so clearly cited as removed from Oldenburg and Glückstadt to be returned to Düsseldorf is furthermore interesting because it provides a very clear map of movement of these artifacts within the region. The article chronicles the existence of a now complete collection, which brings the inventory of the Düsseldorf gallery up to date for potential future visitors.

In other instances there is genuine reflection on the nature of the person behind the collection, who is seen as inextricably linked to the objects in his or her care and identified closely with the collection. This is the case with the laudable depiction of Heinrich Sebastian Hüsken (1745-1807), a well-known Frankfurt collector, which appeared in a 1799 edition of *Der Neue Teutsche*

*Merkur*. A deliberate and careful inventory of items in the collection is made, and Johann Isaak Gerning, a prominent contemporary collector and art connoisseur, praises the assembly of objects as socially and culturally relevant (1799). It is interesting to note that in this particular case the value of the narrated objects helped establish Hüsgen's identity, for it is only through their glowing appraisal that Hüsgen's name made it into print in the first place and became known to the reading public. Material culture becomes the marker of Hüsgen's identity in this article.

The personal testimony that formed the type of discourse of these articles was carefully constructed. The perspective of individual authors, regardless of whether they chose to remain anonymous or not, played as important a role in the articles as the art itself. Various techniques were used to highlight the individual stance of the narrator and to emphasize this unique source of observation. In many cases, the intimacy of the depiction was accentuated by the fact that the information was relayed in the form of a letter, rather than through a more formally crafted essay. The author Goethe famously referred to the personal letter as an essential means of self-reflection and praised its ability to elicit genuine thought from the individual (1998d: 13). And within the context of 18th-century Germany it was indeed this meditative pause that proved so beneficial in recounting and narrating the aesthetic experience of art. The format of the letter allowed for the authenticity and subjectivity of the experience to come through, but it also granted this experience a certain credibility, making it believable to the reader who may never have the opportunity to view the narrated items in person.

Because they were communicating from a distance, authors used certain tropes to enhance the potency of their message. A common and persuasive means to communicate with the reader was what Chloe Chard has termed "the hyperbole of indescribability" (1999: 84). This type of utterance was an exaggeration of incompetence on the part of the author who would openly claim an inability to speak on what had been seen. The author would proclaim rhetorical incompetence and then quote the sensation of a particular scene as defeating all attempts at visual representation. The description itself would not be omitted, for the authors would then (traditionally) continue

to write about that which they had seen, "affirming their own status as eye-witnesses, who have encountered the objects of commentary in person and undergone an experience that is beyond the imaginative grasp of those who know these objects only through the mediation of art and literature" (1999: 85). This is certainly a technique that Wilhelm Heinse practises in the examples cited above. This ineffability of experience undermined the mediation that was supposedly available through print, but it also proved useful insofar as it established the status and presence of the speaking subject (the author). Significantly, the commitment made through such statements was a commitment to the observation of a scene, rather than to the reading of a scene; in doing so these statements promoted first-hand on-site investigation. Furthermore, by reporting their aesthetic experiences in this matter, authors were asserting their belief that knowledge was firmly rooted in personal experience rather than in theoretical sources alone. With this assertion both travel and mobility became important tools for acquiring intellectual sophistication.

Reports from actual art exhibits also contain many instances of authors undermining the vital capacity of prose to communicate. In such cases a visit to the exhibit was deemed the only legitimate means to experience a collection in full. For example, in *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* in "Briefe über die Berliner Kunstausstellung in Oktober 1804" (Letters on the Berlin Art Exhibit, October 1804), sculptor and artist Johann Gottfried Shadow praised the complexity of the Berlin exhibit and was thrilled with its scope and aesthetic value. However, he dismissed the official printed catalogue as the appropriate medium to learn about it, deeming this inventory not only incomplete, but also an essentially inadequate means to understand the essence of the exhibit: "Die Ausstellung ist noch nicht so stark als in diesem Jahre besucht worden, und das Interesse steigt sichtbar. Der Anblick davon ist wirklich prachtvoll. Die ausgestellten Sachen füllen 6 große Säle und sind in dem gedrucktem Verzeichnisse bei weitem nicht alle aufgeführt" (1805: 53; The exhibit has never been as visited as it has been this year and this interest is visibly rising. The entire sight is remarkable. The exhibited items fill six great salons and are not listed in their entirety in the printed inventory). Shadow presented the exhibit

as an event that simply could not be narrated. His rejection of the catalogue as the presentational means is an encouragement to the reader to travel and to come and see the exhibit in person. For Shadow, this in-person viewing is the only viable way to gain knowledge of the event. The spatial display of the exhibit was dutifully conveyed in the provided description, yet it was also dismissed, indicating that, yes, reading is useful for informative purposes but in itself cannot communicate the authentic experience that occurred in the factual forum, both physical and social, of the museum.

Another significant and well-promoted art exhibition taking place at the end of the century was the *Weimarer Kunstausstellung*, organized by the so-called *Weimarer Kunstfreunde*, a group of art lovers who had congregated around the author Goethe, wanting to assist him in his program of reviving neoclassical art. This annual exhibit was promoted quite deliberately through print, and Goethe utilized his own periodical *Propyläen* (1798-1800) for this cause. His overall objective was to assemble the best artists in Germany and to give them prominence in both print and in factual space, providing a forum in which they could work together to create inspiring neo-classical artifacts. Significantly, his project was also meant to draw the general public to Weimar and to have the public witness the effects of this carefully designed art in person. In other words, there was a clear physical dimension to the entire project, despite the aesthetical ruminations and inclinations of its founders. When writing about the exhibit, Heinrich Meyer, Goethe's close collaborator, focused on the interest and curiosity surrounding the event, noting that its primary objective was "*daß das Publikum lebhafteren Teil daran nimmt*" (1998: 818), that the audience assume a more proactive and present role in Weimar art affairs. To encourage such active participation, Goethe created a synopsis of national artistic activity in a separate edition of the *Propyläen*. His essay "*Flüchtige Übersicht über die Kunst in Deutschland*" (1998b; Brief Overview of Art in Germany) provided an authoritative map of cities in which artistic holdings could be found. It cited urban centres that Goethe thought worthy of consideration. One should not underestimate the sway this rhetoric must

have had on Goethe's loyal readership, and the role that this prose played in shaping their own critical understanding of the cultural geography of their country.

*Über Kunst und Altertum* (1998c, 1999a, 1999b; On Art and Antiquity, 1816-1832) was another publication in which Goethe attempted to systematize the state of art in Germany through print and in which he mapped exhibits and the display of material culture throughout the country for interested readers. The journal began as a *Denkschrift*, a memorandum, for the Prussian government and was a survey of a particular region. In 1815-1816 Goethe undertook the task of assessing the damage done by Napoleonic forces in the Rhein and Main regions and he dedicated the first volume of this new journal to the cause (*Kunst und Altertum in den Rhein- und Maingegenden*). Later editions of this publication abstained from political involvement and focused more universally on *Kunst* (art) and *Altertum* (antiquity) respectively, chronicling the development and manifestation of modern museum culture throughout Germany. Goethe included many actual inventories of collections in the *Kunst und Altertum*, believing that the assembly of this written data was essential to the cause of properly understanding material culture.

What is ultimately interesting about all of this writing is the desire to chronicle the existence of material culture for a reading public and to systematize this knowledge of material objects through print for motivated readers who wanted to appreciate the facts for themselves. There was great awareness that print could stimulate the imagination and inspire readers but, rather significantly, also a trust that print could do the subject of material culture justice, appropriately conveying the meaning of items to a large, and generally uninitiated, audience. Text was thus not used for the purpose of discursive constructions of knowledge alone. Within the unique sociopolitical circumstances of 18th-century Germany, text was the means of granting both mobility and visibility to objects that would otherwise remain unseen, instigating an interest in material and aesthetic culture that continues to this day.



## Notes

1. All translations mine.

## References

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